Illuminating the 10 Stages of Genocide through Rywka's Diary

SEARCH
BACK TO BLOG >>

"Oh, to write!… To be able to write, to make pen move on paper! I need to write." - Rywka Lipszyc (December 24th, 1943)

April is Genocide Awareness Month. It marks a number of anniversaries related to genocides that have occurred in the twentieth century. Research conducted by Dr. Gregory H. Stanton shows that there are ten documented stages of how it is possible for genocide to occur. The "Ten Stages of Genocide" are: Classification, Symbolization, Discrimination, Dehumanization, Organization, Polarization, Preparation, Persecution, Extermination, and Denial.

Stanton developed these stages to show that genocide cannot be committed by just an individual or small group; it must have support of a state and the cooperation of a large group of people. These stages sometimes happen simultaneously and can continue over long periods of time. In order to prevent future genocides from happening, it is important that we familiarize ourselves with these ten stages and speak out when we recognize them happening.

The Ten Stages of Genocide are reflected clearly in the story of Rywka Lipszyc, a young girl who lived in the Łódź Ghetto during the Holocaust, and the subject of Jewish Museum Milwaukee's special exhibit "The Girl in the Diary: Searching for Rywka from the Łódź Ghetto." While living in the ghetto, Rywka kept a diary in which she recorded a moving testament of what life was like for an adolescent girl living through the Holocaust. Looking at the Ten Stages of Genocide through the writings found in the diary of Rywka Lipszyc makes the Holocaust feel more human. It gives a name and life to one of the millions of people who experienced this horrific genocide.

Stage 1: Classification

The first stage is Classification. This stage is defined by separating groups of people by categories such as race, religion, or nationality, in order to create a mentality of "us and them." According to Stanton, the more segregated a society is the more likely they are to have a genocide.

On September 15th, 1935, the German Parliament passed the Nuremberg Race Laws, which defined Jews not by their religion, but as their own race. This was done to make Jews the "other" in German society.

Through the writings in her diary, it is clear that Rywka very much defined herself as a practicing Orthodox Jew and was proud of her heritage and religious traditions.

"But I do know that God will take care of me! Oh, it's good that I'm a Jewish girl, that I was taught to love God … I'm grateful for all this! Thank you, God." - Rywka (February 2, 1944)

Stage 2: Symbolization

The second stage is Symbolization. In this stage, symbols are given to the "other" to accompany the classifications of ethnicity, race, religion, or nationality. These symbols are forced unwilling onto members of the minority group as a form of visual identification.

On September 1st, 1941, all Jews over the age of 6 were ordered to wear a yellow Star of David. These badges were used to stigmatize and humiliate Jews. They were also used as a form of segregation, control, and preparation for further stages.

This is one of the most striking examples of "symbolization." However, these types of laws were enacted early on in the Holocaust. For instance, in 1938 Jews were required to adopt the middle name Israel (for men) and Sara (for women) in order to identify them as Jews. Jews were also forced to carry registration cards that detailed their ancestry and their passports were stamped with a red 'J'.

Throughout her diary, Rywka understands that her place in society is the "other" and that she has no control over her own future. You can see this sentiment in the following quote:

"At this moment I'd like to do so much for the world. I see many, many defects and I feel so sorry that I can't find a place for myself. And when I realize that I don't matter in the world, that I'm just a speck of dust, that I can't do anything, at this moment, I feel much worse, I'm suffocating and I'm helpless…" - Rywka (March 29, 1944)

Stage 3: Discrimination

The third stage is Discrimination. During this stage, the dominant group uses laws, customs, and political power to deny the rights of the minority. These groups are not given their full civil rights and often times are even stripped of their citizenship.

In 1935, German Jews were stripped of their citizenship. Jews were highly restricted from participating in public education. Many Jewish businesses were "Aryanized" and sold off to non-Jews.

Due to the wholistic discrimination facing the Jews during this time, religious beliefs were altogether disrespected by the German majority. Jews were forced to work on the Sabbath and holidays, and Rywka's reaction to this is disheartening.

"This day, this holy, sacred day, is for them an ordinary and normal weekday.(…) for me, going to the workshop on Saturday was a terrible agony. I thought involuntarily: If I have to do it again (I wish I wouldn't), will it become commonplace for me, will I get used to it? Oh, God, do something so I wouldn't have to go to the workshop on Saturday!" - Rywka (February 25, 1944)

Stage 4: Dehumanization

The fourth stage is Dehumanization. In this stage, the dominant group treats the "other" group as second-class citizens. Those in the process of being dehumanized may be compared to animals, parasites, insects or diseases. According to Stanton, when the "other" is thought of as less than human, it is easier for the dominant group to gain control over them.

On April 1st, 1933, Nazi leadership staged an economic boycott of Jewish owned businesses and offices of Jewish professionals. Nazi soldiers stood outside stores and offices and shouted phrases such as: "The Jews are our misfortune!" In 1935, laws were put into place forbidding marriage between Jews and non-Jews, and in 1938, Jews were barred from all public schools and universities, as well as from cinemas, theaters, and sports facilities. The laws were clear; Jews were no longer considered human to their German counterparts.

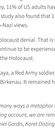
"It hurts so much (for them we are not humans, just machines). Oh, poor! But I'm glad that I can "feel" that it hurts because as long as it hurts, I'm a human being. I can feel—otherwise it would be very bad." - Rywka (February 17, 1944)

Stage 5: Organization

The fifth stage is Organization. During this stage, plans for genocidal killings are made and armies or militias are armed and trained. According to Staton, genocides are often created by the state, but can also be organized informally. The Holocaust is a clear example of a state-organized genocide.

Nazi influence expanded throughout Europe during this stage. The SS, Gestapo, and Kripo (all forms of German police) were being trained to enforce the laws within newly established Jewish ghettos. Concentration Camps were created in Nazi-occupied Poland. By 1941, Germany had annexed Austria, was occupying Poland and had attacked most of Western Europe.

"What's more, there is a new order by Biebow [the chief of German Nazi administration of the Łódź Ghetto] that those who will work fifty-five hours a week will receive a coupon (a half kilo [about 1 pound] of bread, 2 dkg [about ¾ ounce] of fat, 10 dkg [about 3.5 ounces] of sausage). Passes are not being issued and people are speeding up production. This coupon will take away more than it will bring." - Rywka (December 13, 1943)



Stage 6: Polarization

The sixth stage is Polarization. In this stage, the dominant group broadcasts propaganda that reinforces already established prejudice and hate. Laws are put in place that forbid social interaction between the two groups.

During this time, ghettos were widely established throughout European nations. Ghettos were enclosed areas that isolated Jews from the non-Jewish population and from other Jewish communities. Living conditions were miserable, people were put on starvation diets, and slave labor was the only means of survival. This stage is also when the Nazi party began talking about plans for "ethnic purification," a "final solution" to the Jewish problem in Europe.

Łódź Ghetto had the second-largest Jewish population in Poland after Warsaw. Rywka's life in the Ghetto was painful. Her family was deported one by one, and at times her sorrows became overwhelming.

"I can't give up! But who's thinking of giving up?… Oh, I feel that I'm sinking more and more into a swamp and must… and… I can't get out … No! I won't let it happen! I'll do my best! But again I'm overwhelmed by exhaustion! Oh, how can I stop it? Who can help me? This ghetto is a terrible hell." - Rywka (February 23, 1944)

Stage 7: Preparation

The seventh stage is Preparation. During this stage, leaders of the dominant group plan for the "final solution." Euphemisms are often used to cloak their intentions, such as using terms like "ethnic purification" or "counter-terrorism" to disguise their goals. They indoctrinate the general population to fear the victim group. Stogran's touch as, "If we don't kill them, they will kill us," are often used by leaders in the dominant group.

On January 20th, 1942, the Wannsee Conference took place outside of Berlin. It was here that Reinhard Heydrich presented German officials and the Nazi party with a "final solution to the Jewish question." The "final solution" was a code name for the mass murder of European Jews.

During the conference, Heydrich announced: *"In large labor columns, separated by gender, able-bodied Jews will be brought to those regions to build roads, whereby a large number will doubtlessly be lost through natural reduction. Any final remnant that survives will doubtless consist of the elements most capable of resistance. They must be dealt with appropriately, since, representing the fruit of natural selection, they are to be regarded as the core of a new Jewish revival."*

Stage 8: Persecution

The eighth stage is Persecution. In this stage, victims are identified and separated from society based on their ethnic or religious identity. They are deported to concentration camps and genocidal killings begin. According to Stanton, these killings are considered genocidal because they are carried out with the intention to destroy the victim group.

On January 16th, 1942, German authorities began deporting Jews from the Łódź Ghetto to Chelmno killing center. This mass deportation was known as the *zanga* and included 70,000 Jews including Rywka's youngest siblings. In her diary, Rywka is often struggling with the devastation she feels over the loss of her family and guilt from being the one who survived the deportation.

"The zanyas! How many tragic memories, how much pain and longing, how much anxiety (I can't even enumerate all of them) are contained in this single word! Oh, God, how much horror! Just a single memory… and what if there's a zanga again? Is it a typo? Fortunately it's not, thank God, like the other time." - Rywka (February 20, 1944)

Stage 9: Extermination

The ninth stage is Extermination. Extermination begins and becomes the mass killing known as "genocide." It is defined by Stanton as "extermination" by the dominant group because they do not see the victim group as being fully human.

From August 9th to 28th, 1944, SS and local police liquidated the Łódź Ghetto and deported all but 877 Jews to Auschwitz-Birkenau Concentration Camps. The 175,000 Jews that once lived in the Łódź Ghetto had all been deported.

Rywka and her remaining family were a part of this final deportation. However, the last entry in her diary is dated before this deportation in April 1944. The reason she stopped writing is unknown.

"We are in darkness… somebody is pushing us… and pushing… we can't resist… and we're sinking… and we're getting stuck… God, help us get out!!! Unfortunately, help isn't coming yet. Who knows if it's going to come in time?" - Rywka (February 24, 1944)

Stage 10: Denial

The tenth stage is Denial. In this stage, the perpetrators dig up the mass graves, burn the bodies, cover-up evidence and intimidate witnesses. They deny that any crime was committed and place the blame on the victims. While they are still in power, the dominant group blocks the investigations of their crimes and continue to govern until they are driven out by force. Once they are no longer the governing power, they flee into exile.

Holocaust denial is the attempt to deny and/or change the atrocities committed by Nazi Germany against Jews and other groups during the Holocaust. According to a 2018 study conducted by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, 11% of US adults haven't heard of the Holocaust or were not sure if they had heard of it. The study also found that 11% of US adults found it to be acceptable for an individual to hold Neo-Nazi views.

Lack of Holocaust education is the leading cause of Holocaust denial. That is why Holocaust diaries, such as Rywka's, are so important and must continue to be experienced. These diaries give names and faces to the 6 million that perished in the Holocaust.

Rywka Lipszyc's diary was found by Zivaida Berezovskaya, a Red Army soldier, in the spring of 1945 outside of the crematoria in liberated Auschwitz-Birkenau. It remained hidden for nearly 70 years after its discovery. It was published in 2014.

"The improbable survival of Rywka Lipszyc's diary is in many ways a metaphor for the inextinguishable spark of Jewish life. Through this moving account, we are reminded that 6 million is just a number, to which we are all too numbed." - Daniel Gordis, Koret Distinguished Fellow, Shalem College, Jerusalem

Images:
- Rywka's Diary, courtesy Jewish Family and Children's Services Holocaust Center (San Francisco).
- Rywka's Registration Card from the Łódź Ghetto, courtesy State Archive in Łódź.
- Women and children on either side of a chain-link fence in the Łódź Ghetto, courtesy Jewish Family and Children's Services Holocaust Center (San Francisco).
- Girls working in sewing workshop, courtesy Jewish Family and Children's Services Holocaust Center (San Francisco).
- Entry to the ghetto, courtesy Jewish Family and Children's Services Holocaust Center (San Francisco).
- A page from the Wannsee Protocol. Underlined in red: "Emigration has now been replaced by evacuation of the Jews to the East, as a further possible solution, with the appropriate prior authorization by the Führer." Courtesy of House of the Wannsee Conference.
- Jews being deported from the Łódź Ghetto, courtesy Yad Vashem.
- A young woman weeps, courtesy Jewish Family and Children's Services Holocaust Center (San Francisco).

This website is sponsored by the **Peck Foundation Milwaukee, LTD.**

© Copyright 2021 Jewish Museum Milwaukee. All rights reserved. Privacy Policy | Terms of Use